

# Random Thoughts 16

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## Valentine's Day

This always falls on February 14<sup>th</sup>. My first recollections of it are from my elementary school days. At that time, in the early and mid-1950s we made Valentine's Day cards to exchange with each other. On that day we also got gifts of simple little candies usually in the shape of a heart. Then as I got older, I remember giving boxes of chocolate and flowers to girls. By the time I was university age I then would take a girl I liked out to dinner in addition to giving her flowers and chocolate.

I was surprised to see that the custom in Japan was observed differently. Here women gave men chocolate. That really amazed me. I don't remember girls or women giving men anything on Valentine's Day in America. The *giri choko* [obligatory chocolates] is also heard at this time. From what I understand it refers to a sense of obligation on the part of women to give men in their workplace gifts of chocolate.

The custom of women giving men gifts of chocolate, just the opposite custom of that in America, seemed to fit the image of Japan I had when I first came more than 50 years ago. At that time it seemed that Japan was a "man's world." That is to say, men were treated with great deference<sup>1</sup> at that time, almost as though they were kings. So the custom of women giving men chocolate sort of made sense<sup>2</sup> to me.

I think my general impression, though, is that Valentine's Day is primarily promoted by chocolate makers to sell their product. It is very commercialized<sup>3</sup>. This seems especially true when White Day began in Japan in 1978. It was started by the National Confectionery Industry Association. This day falls on March 14<sup>th</sup> and it is a time when men then give women gifts of chocolate in reciprocation<sup>4</sup> for chocolate they had previously received.

Customs often evolve<sup>5</sup> and change and I think that is happening here in Japan with regards to women giving men chocolate. I recently saw an item on the news saying that an increasing number of women dislike the custom of *giri choko* and in its place going to confectioneries and treating themselves to chocolate treats.

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<sup>1</sup> Polite submission and respect; 敬意

<sup>2</sup> Sort of make sense = 何となく分かる

<sup>3</sup> 商品化された

<sup>4</sup> 返礼

<sup>5</sup> 進化する

